SCHOOL-TO-WORK
Defining Features

Assessing the progress and planning for the future of your STW partnership

SCHOOLTO**WORK**
OPPORTUNITIES
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION   U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

a self-assessment
tool for local partnerships
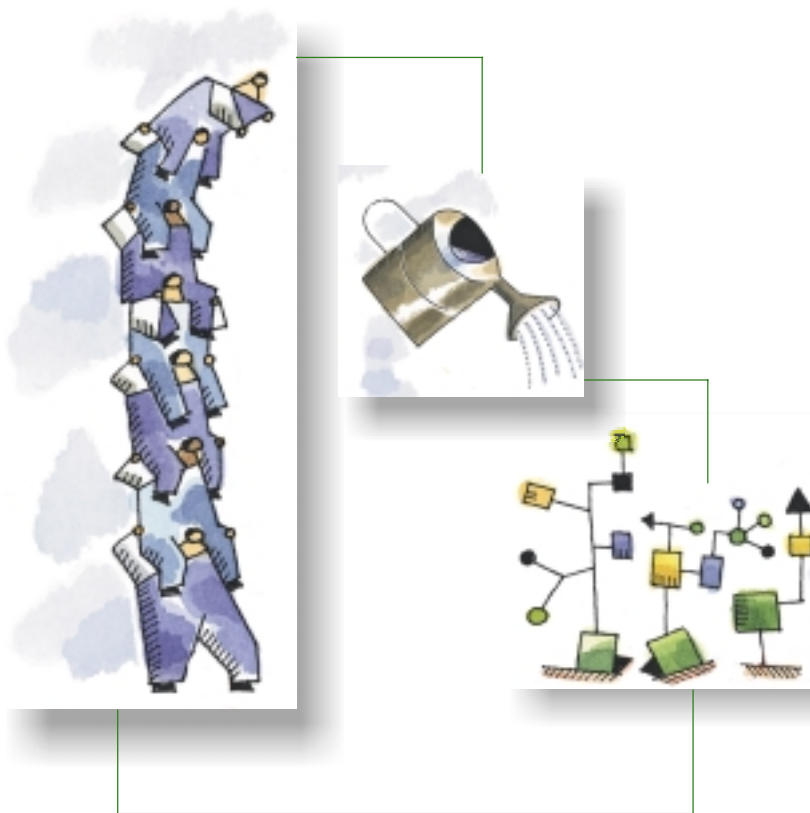
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BACKGROUND AND DESCRIPTION

The *Defining Features Self-Assessment* is designed to help local partnerships create a snapshot of where they are relative to school-to-work sustainability, and progressively move toward refining and improving operations. As the title implies, the self-assessment is structured around the School-to-Work Defining Features, which were developed through a comprehensive, collaborative process spearheaded by the National School-to-Work Office with input from state and local grantees. Altogether, 14 defining items are included on the instrument; they address areas of partnership governance, collaboration among stakeholders, programs and activities that support teaching and learning, and strategies for documenting school-to-work outcomes.
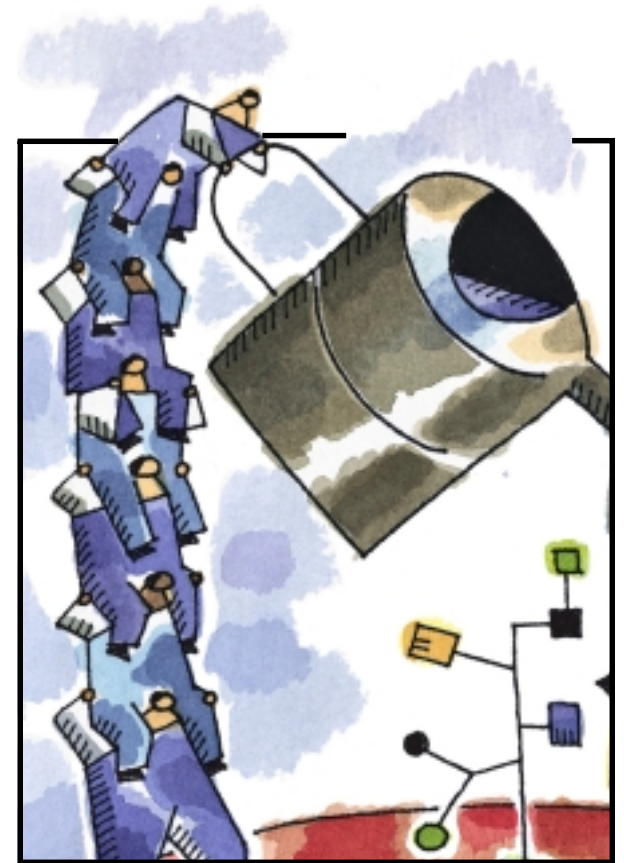
PURPOSE

The major purpose of the *Defining Features Self-Assessment* is to promote continuous improvement. This means that local partnerships can use the self-assessment as a *working* tool:

- to better understand current operations;
- to identify areas of strength, weakness, and opportunity;
- to begin taking action for achieving system scale and sustainability; and,
- to reassess the progress of system-building at regular intervals.
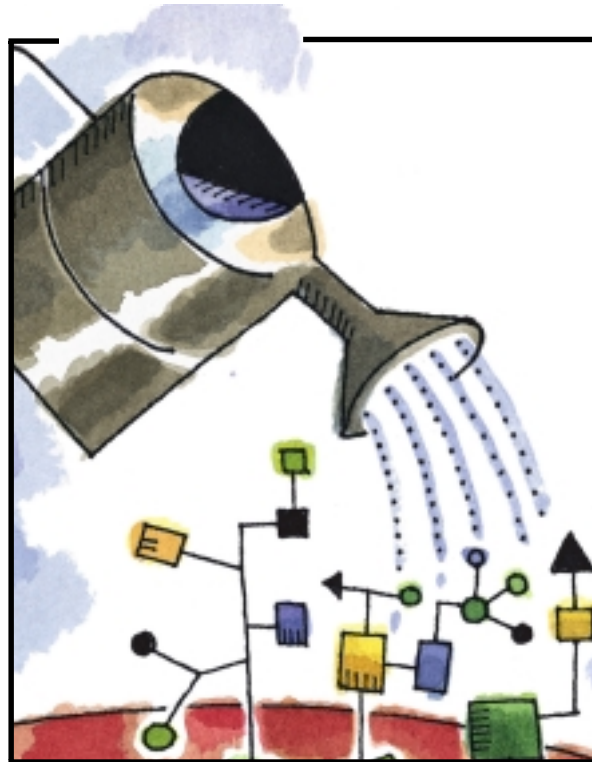
It is designed to facilitate communication and sharing among and within partnerships based upon a common understanding of how an effective school-to-work system can operate. This shared frame of reference will help build commitment and focus for setting priorities and improving school-to-work practices at the local level. Continuous improvement also means that this self-assessment is NOT about accountability and mandates and, as such, *all information will be treated confidentially*.

DIRECTIONS FOR USE

The Defining Features Self-Assessment asks local partnership representatives to rate the status of each defining feature using a five-point rating scale described in the table below.

To facilitate the rating process, the instrument includes a detailed definition of each defining feature.
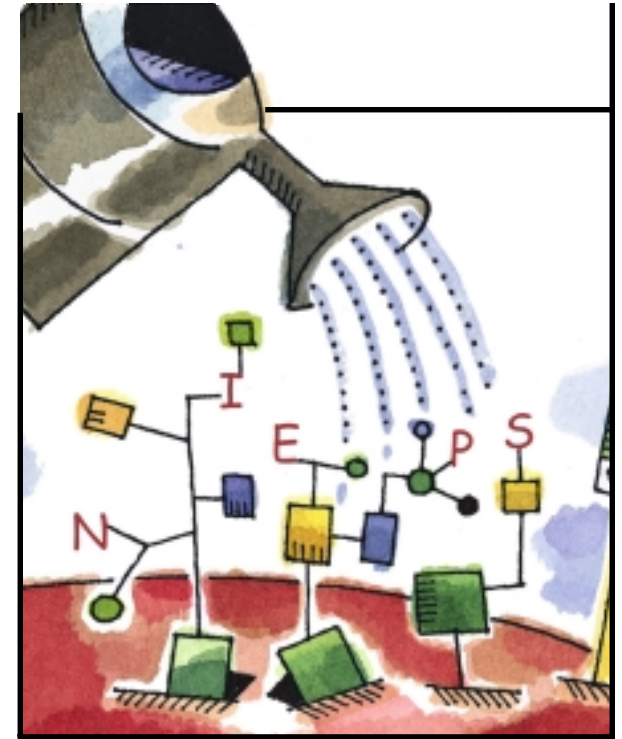
Code	Rating Point	Rubric
N	No Activity	Our partnership is NOT implementing this activity.
E	Emerging Activity	Our partnership is PLANNING to implement this activity.
I	Implementing the Activity	Our partnership is IMPLEMENTING this activity.
P	Poised for Sustaining the Activity	Our partnership is developing PLANS TO SUSTAIN this activity when federal funding expires.
S	Sustaining the Activity	This activity is an ongoing part of our current operations; we are using state and local resources to implement it.

RECOMMENDED STEPS

The following steps are recommended to conduct the assessment.

1. **Determine who will complete the tool.** One approach is to have a representative team of local-level stakeholders complete the instrument as a group. Another is to have individual stakeholders fill out the tool separately, and then have the individual results compiled for group discussion and instrument completion. Still another way is to have the instrument completed by one or two people who are most knowledgeable about the local school-to-work system. Whatever approach is used, it is important to enlist input from all key stakeholder groups.

2. **Determine sources of supporting information.** Determining where to find information to support the self-assessment ratings is a critical next step. Sources of information can include strategic plans, reports, minutes of meetings, mission/vision statements, policies, products, organizational charts, needs assessment results, interagency agreements, training agendas, communiqués, press releases, and so forth. A "point person" should be identified to ensure that background materials are organized and distributed, necessary process meetings are held, and a timeline is established to review all information and complete the assessment tool. The importance of reviewing background information cannot be stressed enough: *data/evidence should drive all rating decisions*.

3. **Complete the self-assessment.** Read each defining feature statement, along with its definition rubric. Individually or as a team, identify where your partnership falls along the five-point continuum from "no activity" (N) to "sustaining the activity" (S). Circle only one rating code and do not mark or circle between the codes. Once ratings on all defining features have been completed, transfer the ratings to the *Summary Form* on page 12.

As you will note, each of the defining features has a broad and inclusive definition rubric. This strategy was taken to capture the rich diversity in approaches to STW system-building, implementation, and sustainability among partnerships across the nation. Therefore, in completing this tool, partnerships may find it useful to base their ratings primarily on those initiatives and activities within the rubric that they are working toward accomplishing.

SELF-ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENT

DEFINING FEATURE	DEFINITION/ RUBRIC	Rating

Rating
N No Activity
E Emerging Activity
I Implementing the Activity
P Poised for Sustaining the Activity
S Sustaining the Activity
(circle one code)

1 **The partnership has broad and active representation, and its structure allows for effective and efficient decision making.**

The partnership encourages input and active involvement from the wide range of community members that have a stake in preparing all students, K-16 and beyond, for college and careers. Community members include K-12 and postsecondary educators and administrators, business and industry, organized labor, parents, students, community-based organizations, representatives of special populations, stakeholder organizations and associations, school boards, government agencies, locally elected officials, and other key stakeholders and end-users. Input and involvement from these members occurs primarily through a governing body and/or committees that focus on key aspects of STW system-building, implementation, and sustainability. To promote effective and efficient decision making, representatives on *governing bodies and committees are of sufficient authority and status to make decisions* on behalf of the organizations they represent. Moreover, a process is in place to bring committee ideas and recommendations to the larger governing body for quick decision and action.

N E I P S

2 **The local partnership has a shared vision for its STW system.**

The partnership has a clear and concise statement on the intended impact of its STW system. The statement includes a desired end condition and identifies customers or end-users that efforts are directed toward. The vision is developed through a consensus process and is supported by all partners and members of organizations that they represent. Partners provide leadership for achieving the vision through policies and practices of the partnership and their individual organizations. Through their individual organizations, *partners also contribute funds, staff, equipment, and other resources that support the partnership's vision.*

N E I P S

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DEFINING FEATURE	DEFINITION/ RUBRIC	Rating
		N No Activity E Emerging Activity I Implementing the Activity P Poised for Sustaining the Activity S Sustaining the Activity (circle one code)
3 **The partnership builds upon existing programs and services in the community.**	The partnership brings together multiple and often disparate programs and services in the community – initiated through many federal, state, and local funding sources – that focus on preparing youth for college and careers. By connecting these initiatives, not only are personnel, finances, and resources maximized, but youth are provided with comprehensive education, workforce development and economic development services.	N E I P S
4 **The partnership plays a role that neither school districts nor employers can perform by themselves.**	The partnership plays a crucial role in STW system-building and implementation by performing functions that schools, employers, organized labor, and other community stakeholders value but are not able to provide effectively or efficiently on their own. These functions may include convening members for policy discussions; sponsoring professional development activities and events; maintaining clearinghouses of information, best practices, and resources; organizing student workplace learning experiences and teacher internships/externships; implementing public information campaigns; and conducting comprehensive STW system evaluations. Through these functions, not only are personnel, finances, and other resources in the community maximized, but possible duplication of effort in delivering education and workforce development services for youth are avoided.	N E I P S

DEFINING FEATURE	DEFINITION/ RUBRIC	Rating
		N No Activity **E** Emerging Activity **I** Implementing the Activity **P** Poised for Sustaining the Activity **S** Sustaining the Activity (circle one code)
5 **The partnership serves as a catalyst for educational reform, particularly at the high school level.**	The partnership organizes working groups of practitioners to plan for innovations in teaching and learning that *help all students achieve high academic and technical skill standards*. Innovations may include developing local school improvement plans; designing curriculum that aligns with state academic and industry-recognized skill standards; developing instructional strategies that combine academic and career/technical subject matter and support learning in the context of real-life applications and careers; developing authentic performance assessments; and revising graduation requirements to recognize workplace learning experiences and other STW opportunities. The partnership also assists districts and schools implement new approaches for organizing the school day so that students may benefit from instruction in smaller learning environments and at off-site, community and workplace venues. Once innovations are adopted, the partnership provides ongoing support through information dissemination, promoting best practices, and conducting rigorous evaluations to examine the impacts of innovations on student outcomes.	N E I P S
6 **The partnership has an organized strategy for actively involving and retaining employers and organized labor.**	The partnership has ongoing strategies for recruiting new and retaining existing employers and organized labor representatives. Recruitment is based in part on *regular analyses of labor market information* so that employers and organized labor represent the sizes and types of businesses within the community. Once on board, the partnership promotes their active involvement and retention by: appointing them to governing bodies and committees; training their staffs as workplace mentors; and matching students with workplace learning experiences at their businesses. Partnership efforts minimize duplication of effort that would likely occur if businesses were each required to work with districts and schools individually.	N E I P S

DEFINING FEATURE	DEFINITION/ RUBRIC	Rating
		N No Activity
		E Emerging Activity
		I Implementing the Activity
		P Poised for Sustaining the Activity
		S Sustaining the Activity
		(circle one code)

7 **The partnership has the capacity to respond to requests for information and technical assistance from its practitioners and end-users.**

In its role as broker of information, the partnership has a well-publicized and utilized mechanism for practitioners and end-users to request information and resources, and receive timely services. Mechanisms include web sites, list servs, toll free numbers, and e-mail. As requested, the partnership has a process to connect – either electronically or in person – practitioners and end-users with experts for technical assistance on STW system-building, implementation, and sustainability.

N   E   I   P   S

8 **The partnership plays a significant role in providing professional development to STW partners.**

Based on periodic needs assessments, the partnership organizes professional development activities to ensure that all partners – educators, employers, organized labor, teachers, counselors, parents, and others – can effectively fulfill their roles and responsibilities in STW system-building and implementation. In planning professional development activities, the partnership provides opportunities for *sustained and innovative experiences* such as teacher or faculty internships/ externships, institutes, distance learning opportunities, web-based practitioner dialogues, and research projects. These activities are arranged with flexibility to accommodate schedules of individual partners that must plan and work together. The partnership also works with appropriate individuals or entities to ensure that participation in these *experiences are recognized in state and local teacher licensure and credentialing procedures*.

N   E   I   P   S

DEFINING FEATURE	DEFINITION/ RUBRIC	Rating
		N No Activity **E** Emerging Activity **I** Implementing the Activity **P** Poised for Sustaining the Activity **S** Sustaining the Activity (circle one code)
9 The partnership has strategies to ensure that all students have equal access and full opportunity to participate in STW activities.	The partnership promotes equal access and full participation in STW opportunities for all youth regardless of background or ability level. Access and participation are achieved by making *appropriate accommodations and modifications to classroom and workplace learning* environments. Accommodations may include providing guidance on the development of individual education/career plans to include workplace learning and other STW experiences; developing print and electronic materials in alternate formats; and providing tutoring or job coaches at workplace learning sites.	N E I P S
10 The partnership promotes the inclusion of career awareness and development activities across grade levels and subject areas.	The partnership convenes working groups of practitioners to plan for activities that broaden and deepen student's knowledge of careers so that, ultimately, they may make more informed career choices. Activities may include incorporating career awareness and development activities across the K-16 curriculum; designing student career planning guides; and developing broad career pathways/clusters that help students organize and select academic and career/technical courses based on their career interests.	N E I P S

DEFINING FEATURE	DEFINITION/ RUBRIC	Rating

11 **The partnership fosters quality work-based learning experiences connected to students' academic and career/ technical courses in school.**

The partnership serves as or works with a *third party intermediary organization* that conducts activities in support of intensive and sustained workplace learning experiences for students. Activities may include designing work-based curriculum that incorporates state and industry-recognized skill standards; developing instructional materials that connect students' workplace experiences – including part-time jobs obtained on their own – to their academic and career/technical courses in school; arranging teacher internships/externships at businesses; providing training for school-based and workplace mentors; and matching students with workplace learning experiences. Third party intermediaries also disseminate information on best practices and resources for implementing quality workplace learning experiences.

N   E   I   P   S

12 **The partnership fosters relationships between high schools and postsecondary institutions to facilitate the transition of students to further education and careers.**

Building on *established models such as Tech-Prep and cooperative education*, the partnership supports existing and new relationships among secondary schools and two- and four-year postsecondary institutions. Through these relationships, joint advisory councils for program and curriculum development are established, common cooperative education standards are developed, joint professional development activities are held, and changes are made in postsecondary admissions criteria to grant college credit or advanced standing for secondary coursework and workplace learning. The partnership also *fosters changes in pre-service teacher education programs* to include instruction on STW principles and practices.

N   E   I   P   S

		Rating
		N No Activity E Emerging Activity I Implementing the Activity P Poised for Sustaining the Activity S Sustaining the Activity (circle one code)

13 **The partnership has an effective communication strategy for keeping its membership and the wider community informed of its activities and outcomes.**	The partnership has multiple and ongoing strategies to provide current information to both its membership and the wider community. Information relates to the partnership's vision and initiatives, best practices for STW system-building, upcoming professional development activities or events, technical assistance providers and products, evaluation findings, and resources for sustainability. Among the many strategies for information dissemination are newsletters, brochures, fact sheets, speaker's kits, professional development activities, web sites, list servs, clearinghouses, public forums, and recognition ceremonies. In implementing these strategies, opportunities are made available for a *two-way exchange of communication* so that those working at the partnership level are kept informed of the experiences and needs of practitioners and end-users in the field.	N E I P S
14 **The partnership has multiple and ongoing strategies for evaluating STW system impacts and student outcomes, and using findings for continuous system improvement.**	The partnership gathers data on STW system and student indicators. System indicators may include changes in institutional policies and practices; extent of involvement of key partners; frequency and intensity of professional development opportunities; and satisfaction of partners and end-users, especially educators, employers, labor representatives, parents, and students. Student indicators may include academic achievement; career/technical knowledge and skills; course-taking patterns; motivation; attendance; graduation; and entry into and retention in postsecondary education, employment, or the military. Data on indicators are gathered through *multiple data collection strategies*, including surveys, interviews, observations, student transcript reviews, and follow-up studies. Evaluation findings are used by the partnership for continuous system improvement, as well as for *public reporting* on the impacts and outcomes of STW.	N E I P S

SUMMARY FORM

Transfer your individual item ratings here:

Rating:

Defining Features:	N	E	I	P	S
1. The partnership has broad and active representation, and its structure allows for effective and efficient decision making	○	○	○	○	○
2. The local partnership has a shared vision for its STW system	○	○	○	○	○
3. The partnership builds upon existing programs and services in the community	○	○	○	○	○
4. The partnership plays a role that neither school districts nor employers can perform by themselves	○	○	○	○	○
5. The partnership serves as a catalyst for educational reform, particularly at the high school level	○	○	○	○	○
6. The partnership has an organized strategy for actively involving and retaining employers and organized labor	○	○	○	○	○
7. The partnership has the capacity to respond to requests for information and technical assistance from its practitioners and end-users	○	○	○	○	○
8. The partnership plays a significant role in providing professional development to STW partners	○	○	○	○	○
9. The partnership has strategies to ensure that all students have equal access and full opportunity to participate in STW activities	○	○	○	○	○
10. The partnership promotes the inclusion of career awareness and development activities across grade levels and subject areas	○	○	○	○	○
11. The partnership fosters quality work-based learning experiences connected to students' academic and career/technical courses in school	○	○	○	○	○
12. The partnership fosters relationships between high schools and postsecondary institutions to facilitate the transition of students to further education and career	○	○	○	○	○
13. The partnership has an effective communication strategy for keeping its membership and the wider community informed of its activities and outcomes	○	○	○	○	○
14. The partnership has multiple and ongoing strategies for evaluating STW system impacts and student outcomes, and using findings for continuous system improvement	○	○	○	○	○

Based on the above summary profile, what is your overall system status? (check one)

○	○	○	○	○
Not implementing most activities	Planning to implement most activities	Implementing most activities	Planning to sustain most activities	Sustaining most activities

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